CHILDREN OF INDIA

A PICTORIAL PRESENTATION

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

CHILDREN OF INDIA

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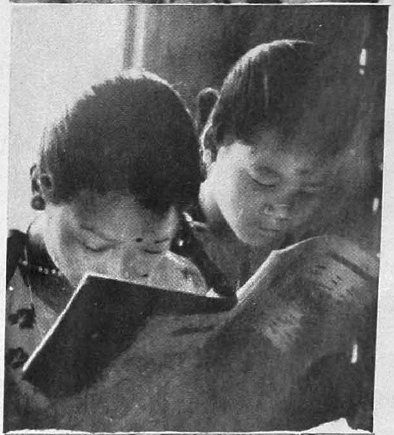

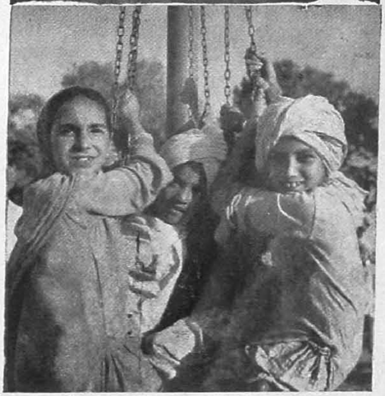

18 MAY 1969

CHILDREN OF INDIA

INDIAN CHILDREN are not very different from children anywhere in the world. They are fond of food, of games, of seeing places, of toys and pets. They love pageantry and festivals and feasts. They are full of curiosity and inventiveness and devise hundreds of ways of entertaining themselves and their elders. Like children anywhere in the world, they need care and love and an environment free from deprivation, both material and mental.

Material deprivation there has been plenty in India. An average Indian family is still not able to meet all the needs of a growing child ; although these needs are no longer as acute or widespread today as they were before 1947 when we attained independence. So many of India's children have grown up in poverty and want for so long that the eyes of the Indian child have over the centuries acquired a depth which is characteristic and indeed unique.

This apart, the Indian child has always been fortunate in a very important respect—the strength of family life in India and the security it affords to the young and old alike. Within the large and settled family bound by powerful traditional ties, children grow up with a sense of belonging. As a rule, Indian children take love, human warmth and attention for granted. All this comes to them as an inextricable part of the very air they breathe ; not as something special directed at them in response to a need.

India, like some other Asian countries, has a fairly large proportion of children in its population. Of India's total population (1961 census) of 438 million, about 173 million are in the age group 0-14 years. Of this about 95 million are in the age group 0-6 years, the 'real' children. By 1971, the total population is expected to rise to around 555 million with 210 million in the age group 0-14 years and 120 million in the age group 0-6 years.

Although we have so many of them, we Indians never get tired of children. It is not unusual, especially in the villages, for several families, related to each other, to live together under one roof. In the big joint family, there is little loneliness for the child. He has scores of companions to play with. There are always aunts and uncles around the house, and grandmothers who tell fascinating tales. No religious ceremony or social occasion is complete without children. They are taken as a matter of course to temples and public functions, to weddings and on visits to relatives.

The size of India, its history and geography have combined to produce a rich variety of climate, culture and customs. Some of the highest peaks and some of the hottest, coldest and wettest regions of the earth are to be found in India. There is hardly any kind of animal and plant life that does not flourish in one or the other part of the country. Elephants, camels, and horses are familiar figures in ceremonial processions and even at fairs and festivals. A large number of households in the villages keep cattle. The cow is ubiquitous, so are parrots, crows and monkeys. They are all part of the world in which the child lives and grows up. So are trees, and flowers and rivers and lakes. Add to these attractions the historical monuments that are strewn over the Indian landscape like pearls. There is so much in the Indian environment to delight and fascinate the child.

Whenever Indian children assemble, you see a miniature India in all its diversity and colour. Language and dress in the Kashmir valley or the Kumaon hills in the north is not the same as in the hills and plains of Kerala or Madras in the south. And, as between Kerala and Madras or Kumaon and Kashmir, there are endless variations. The children in Kashmir grow up speaking Kashmiri, those in Kumaon speak a hill dialect of Hindi called Kumaoni. In Kerala, the mother tongue is Malayalam ; in Madras, Tamil. In other parts, other languages are spoken. Dress differs from one region to another, varying with climate and custom. The western Himalayan children wear long shirts, the central Himalayan children wear small shirts, the eastern Himalayan children wear no shirts at all. (They wear a local variant of waist-coats).

The *shalwar* of the Punjabi child is as different from the long skirt of the Tamilian child as the *lehnga* of the Rajasthani girl is from the *lungi* of the Assamese.

However, with the growth of cities and improved communication between towns and villages, these differences tend to diminish and become less relevant. In cosmopolitan cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, in the new industrial and commercial townships, and wherever families from different parts of the country live and work together, a new community of customs and tastes in food and attire comes into being. Thus, the Punjabi *shalwar-kameez* is becoming popular among girls in other parts of the country, and in a large number of Indian homes, South Indian savouries like *dosai* and Bengali sweets like *rasgulla* are relished. This does not mean that the children lose all touch with the traditions of their families or of the regional or religious communities to which their families belong. In the midst of changes in fashion and taste, love for local dress and food persists and finds expression on ceremonials and festivals.

Children in India wait eagerly for such occasions. And, fortunately for them, there is no dearth of these things. Life at home is replete with ceremonials. Some of these centre around the child—naming, first hair-cut, first day at school, and so on. Birth, marriage, death, the building of a house, the buying of a cow, the beginning and end of agricultural seasons—all are occasions for appropriate celebration. Then there is the never-ending procession of religious and national festivals. Every season and every place has its own crop of festivals. Whether it is Diwali, the ancient festival of lights, or Id or Christmas, for the child, it is an occasion to put on a new dress, buy sweets, crackers and toys and visit relatives and friends.

Every festival has its own special flavour. But festivals like Diwali and Holi, Id and Christmas are awaited with particular eagerness. These are essentially children's festivals. Several days before the Diwali day, which heralds the coming of winter every year, special stalls selling clay dolls, crackers and sweets are set up. On the day of the festival itself, houses are decorated with

diwas (little earthen lamps), which are lighted up at dusk. The nights are illuminated with a myriad lights. After religious worship, sweets are distributed, and children run out into the streets to join their friends in firing crackers.

Holi, which coincides with the advent of summer, is celebrated with even more abandon. It is a festival of colour and song and dance. There are ceremonial bonfires, around which boys and girls sing and dance. This is followed by frolicking with coloured water in which friends and strangers, men and women, young and old participate with equal abandon. Holi, in fact, is a child's delight. So is Janmashtami, which celebrates the birth anniversary of the child-god Krishna. In tableaux and in folk-plays, the childhood pranks of Krishna and his playmates are re-enacted with great enthusiasm and devotion.

Over large parts of northern India, Dussehra brings nine days of processions and pegeantry that culminate in the spectacular burning of huge effigies of demons drawn from the Ramayana. In Bengal, during the festivities preceding Dussehra, idols of Durga, the divine Mother, are set up for worship before they are immersed in the river. In Mysore, caparisoned elephants lead colourful processions through illuminated streets.

Id means 'joy', especially the joy that comes from fulfilment or attainment of virtue. Id-ul-Fitr marks the end of month-long fasting and prayer and, therefore, is an occasion for joy. Id-ul-Azha celebrates another kind of fulfilment, namely, the trial and triumph of the Prophet Abraham. For children, the joys of Id take the form of dressing up in their best clothes, greeting each other with hearty 'Id Mubaraks', receiving gifts of money and toys from grown-ups, and partaking of sweetened 'sawai', a delicacy especially associated with Id.

Christmas is celebrated in Indian homes in much the same fashion as it is celebrated all over the Christian world; only, in India a large number of non-Christians observe this festival as if it was one of their own. It has become an occasion for large and gay family get-togethers and exchange of gifts. Shopping for gifts during the days preceding Christmas is a pleasant pastime, parti-

cularly because shops and restaurants put up special decorations for the occasion. In many homes, Christmas trees are set up and cakes (always a treat for the children) are baked. Groups of families and friends, particularly in big cities, organise variety programmes for children ; these usually culminate in the appearance of Santa Claus with a bagful of presents for one and all.

Other festivals bring other joys : kite-flying against a blue sky ; boat races ; wrestling matches ; a sister tying the *rakhi* (ceremonial thread) around the wrist of her brother ; children carrying the idols of Ganesha, the elephant-faced god of good luck, for immersion ; merry-go-rounds at village fairs and swinging under the mango tree.

In recent years, some new festivals have been added to this rich fund of old festivals. There is the Republic Day on January 26, when a huge parade and pageant goes through the streets of Delhi. Contingents of school-going boys and girls participate in this parade as proudly as men of the three wings of the armed forces. August 15 is the anniversary of India's Independence. Young and old celebrate it with equal solemnity. But the children's own festival is Children's Day. This is celebrated every year on November 14, which is the birth anniversary of free India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. He was known to the children of India as 'Chacha' (uncle) Nehru, because the children were as fond of this great Indian leader as he was of them. It is celebrated all over the country in the form of mass rallies of children, community singing, and colourful displays of dancing.

Festivals are a source of fun for children everywhere ; so are games. Indian children are no exception. Go to any city or village in India and you will find that the children of the locality have converted every single vacant plot they can find into a playground. As for children's games, there is a vast repertoire to choose from. Cricket, football, volley-ball, hockey, are today as much a craze with children in India as simpler and more traditional games like *kabaddi* (a more energetic variation of catch-as-catch-can) and *gulli-danda* (a variation of cricket played with a smaller bat and a sharp edged piece of wood serving as a ball).

The reading habits of the Indian child are also catholic. In the cities, Western-type comics are becoming popular, but the taste for stories from the Indian classics and from the rich fund of folk-lore in the regional languages shows no sign of decline. This is reflected in the books for children. Literature for children is on the increase, is produced in all the major languages and employs the latest techniques of presentation and illustration. Children's magazines have large sales. Children's art competitions, children's films, and a children's theatre movement are becoming popular.

In the kind of social organisation evolved in India, there is a natural and easy communication from generation to generation. Values are transmitted through personal instruction and example from father to son, from mother to daughter. Where there are skills to impart, children in India acquire them early by joining their father in the field or by helping their mother in the household chores. The education and upbringing of children, however, is no more the function of their families alone. This has become the concern of the entire community. The State and voluntary welfare agencies like the Indian Council of Child Welfare are both active in this field.

The welfare of children in India is linked up with the general question of economic and social advancement of the country. As production rises in farms and factories, and as education spreads out to every nook and corner of the country, the quality of life in millions of Indian homes undergoes a change. That brings new opportunities and amenities to the growing child.

Many of these amenities were either non-existent or accessible only to a few privileged and well-to-do families in the years preceding the attainment of independence in 1947. Since then, this imbalance is sought to be removed by making amenities like education and medical care available to children of even the poorest parents.

The number of school-going children in India has gone up from about 20 million in 1951 to 70 million in 1966. Today, four-fifths of all children in the age-group 6-11 are at school. Over

large areas primary education is free and compulsory. The aim is to provide as early as possible a minimum of eight years of education to all children.

Conditions in schools are much better today than before. Many schools have libraries for children and schemes for mid-day meal and distribution of free milk. Special attention is paid to physical training and to coaching in arts and crafts. Outside the school, there are children's parks, zoos and recreation centres of various kinds.

Similarly, the health extension programmes in our towns and villages include a wide range of care-taking facilities for children. In the last fifteen years, the number of maternity and child welfare centres in the country has come up from a meagre 1,700 to more than 10,000. Moreover, most of the hospitals and medical colleges in the country today have special wards and departments for children. One notable result of this development is a considerable fall in the rate of infant mortality.

In innumerable ways, new amenities and opportunities are being created for children in India. Invariably, in homes and schools, the most modern techniques in child up-bringing and education exist side by side strict person-to-person training in traditional manners and morals, arts and crafts.

The Indian child, like his parents, lives at once in two worlds. There is the world of traditional home-life, of attachment to family, of ceremonials and festivals, of age-old sights and sounds characteristic of the Indian scene. Woven into the fabric of this old world is the new world of cities and factories, of aeroplanes and fast trains, of electric gadgets and mechanical toys, of carnivals and circuses, of pop music and comic strips. The old world gives a sense of belonging and well-being to the child ; the new presents him with exciting and hitherto unknown opportunities for enjoyment and growth.

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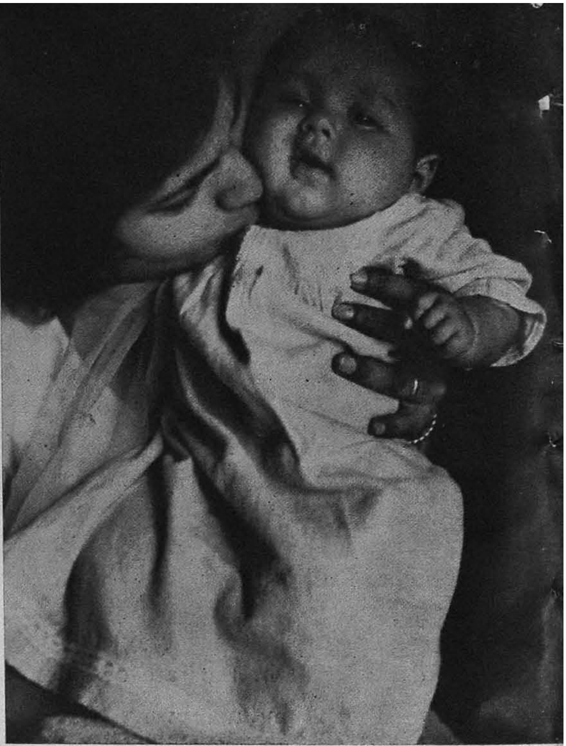

In the life of an Indian child, there is no lack of love, care and attention. In the sun-drenched homes, there is plenty of warmth for the growing child and, in the kind of society we have, powerful family ties give children a sense of well-being and belonging.

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There is a natural and easy communication from generation to generation. Values as well as skills are transmitted, through personal instruction and example, from father to son, mother to daughter. And as they grow up, the young find before them countless avenues of participation in home and community life.

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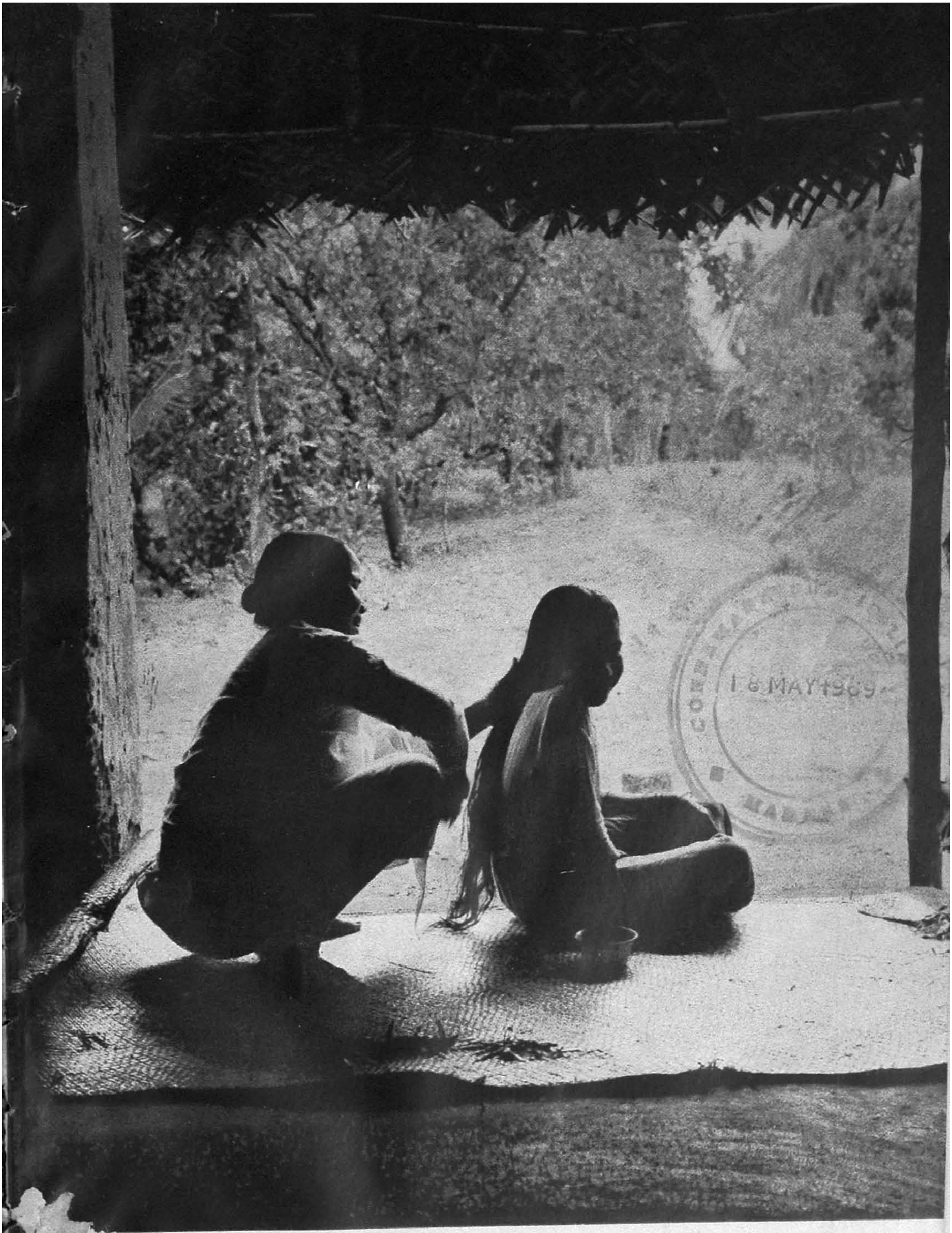

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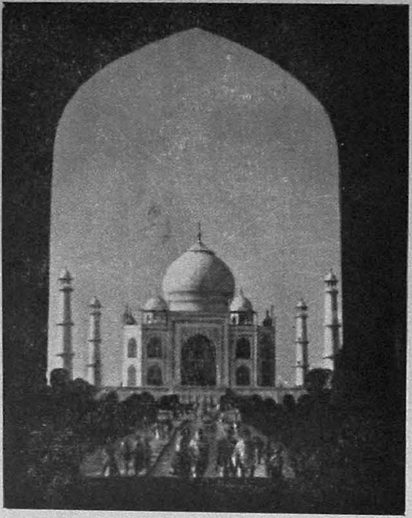

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There is much in the Indian environment to delight and please the child. The richness and variety of life and landscape in India is a ceaseless source of satisfaction for their senses. And the past is always present with them in the form of historical monuments strewn over the Indian countryside like pearls.

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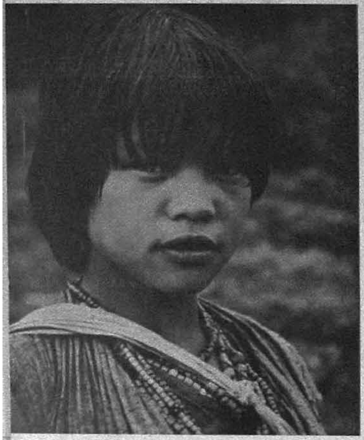

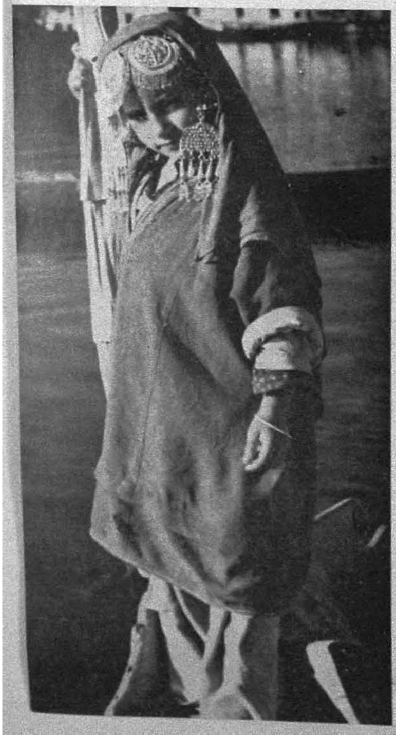

Wherever Indian children assemble you see a miniature India in all its diversity and colour. On this page we see (above from left to right) a tribal boy from NEFA and girls from Gujarat, Bengal, Manipur and Madras. (Below from right to left) are Sikh boys from Punjab, and girls from Kumaon, Madhya Pradesh and Kashmir.

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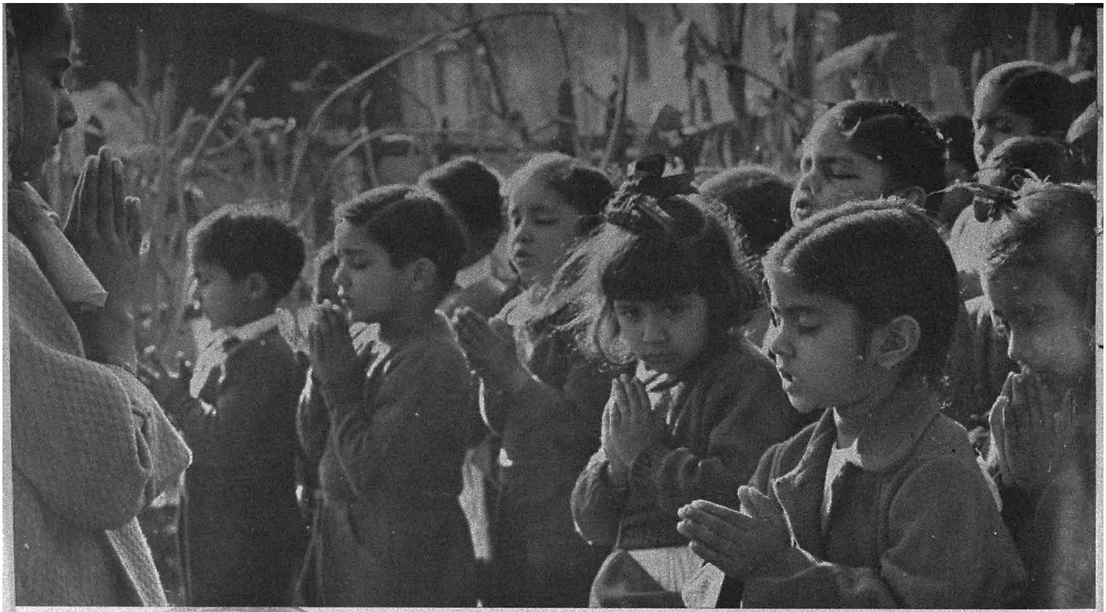

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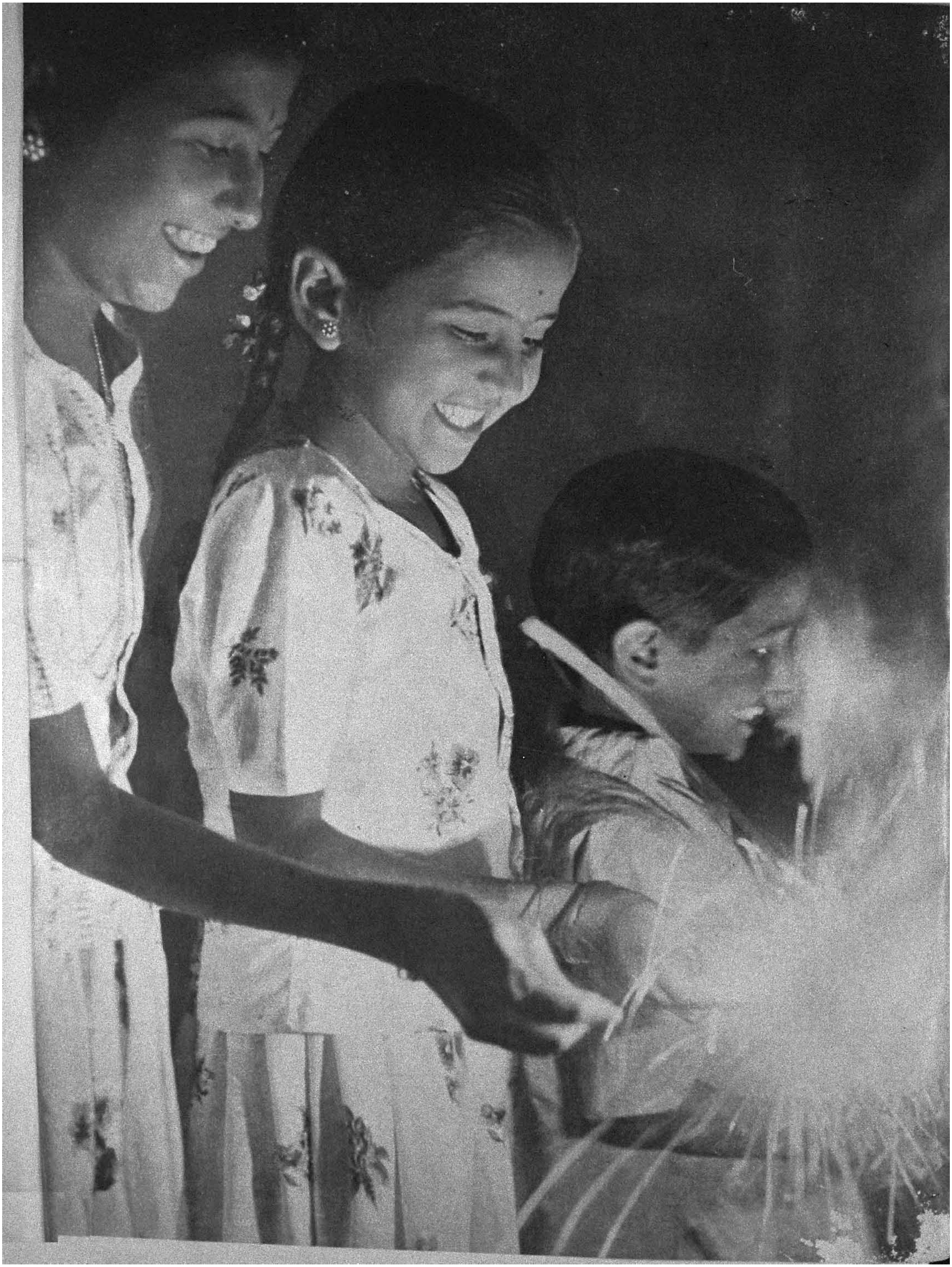
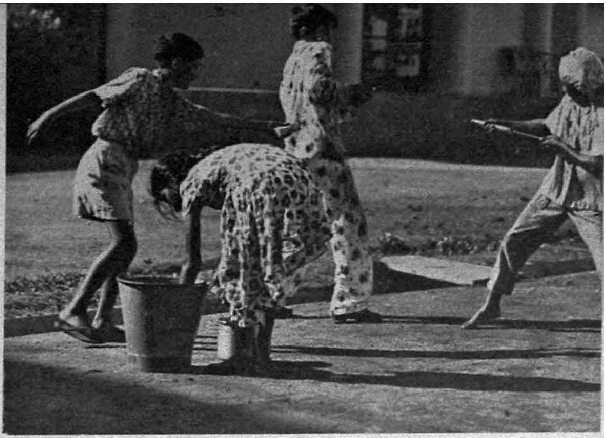
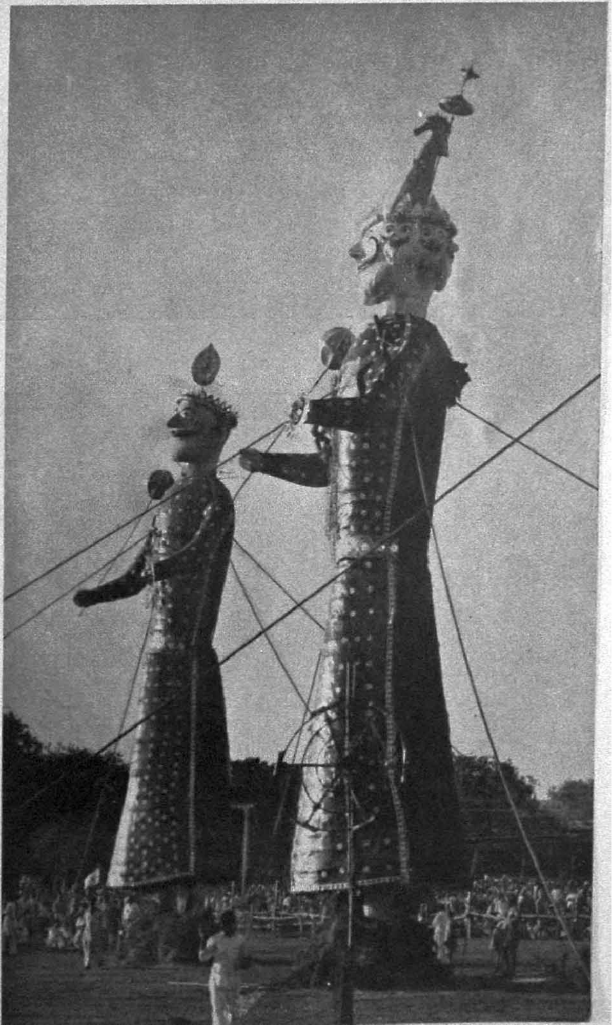
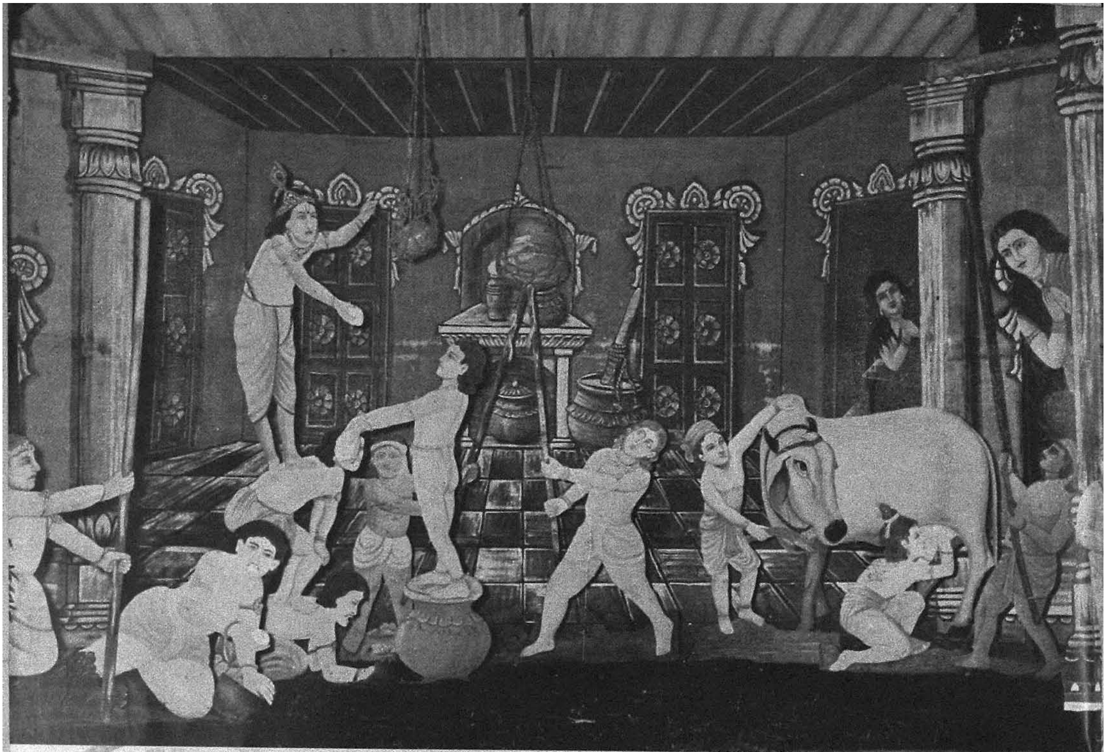
Religion occupies a central place in Indian tradition, and the life at home for an Indian child is one long procession of ceremonials and festivals. Children simply love these occasions and impart to them a degree of sincerity and gaiety of which only they are capable. Santa Claus at Christmas time is as much a favourite here as anywhere in the world. So is the balloon-seller on Id.





Diwali is the festival of lights, when the night is illumined by small earthen lamps and glowing crackers. Holi, which coincides with the advent of summer, becomes an occasion for frolic-some play with coloured water. And on Dussehra, in towns and villages, huge effigies of legendary demons go up in fire and smoke at the end of nine days of fulsome pageantry and festivity.





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A strong favourite with the Indian child is Krishna, the legendary cowherd-hero, whose child-hood pranks are celebrated in numerous festivals. Another favourite is the elephant-headed god Ganesha, whose clay images are found in many Hindu homes and are yearly carried to the nearest tank or river for immersion. For girls in Rajasthan, no festival is complete without a swing, and the girls in Kerala say it with flowers.

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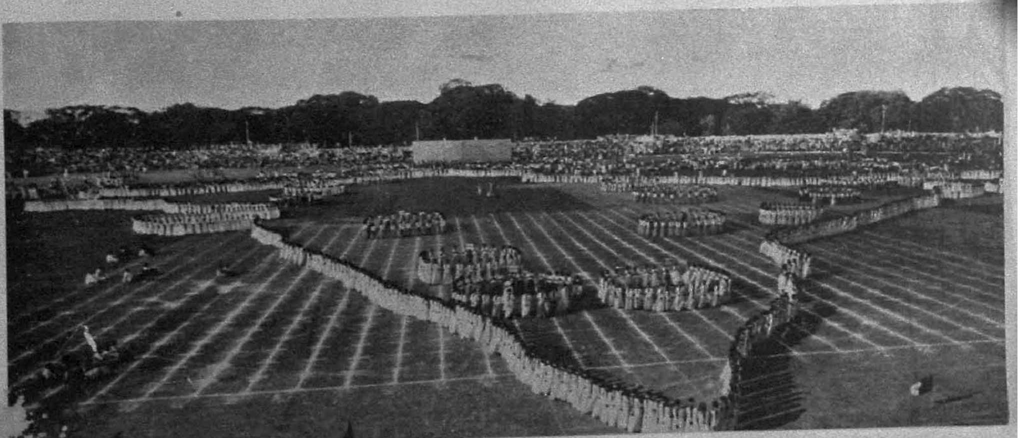
In recent years, three new major festivals have been added to the hundreds of existing ones. These are the Republic Day in January, the Independence Day in August and the Children's Day in November. Children figure in all these festivities, but the last-named, being the birth anniversary of their beloved Chacha (uncle) Nehru, is something special.



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No adventure is so great for the child as the adventure of learning. Something of the eagerness and exhilaration of going to school, of learning to read and write is evident on the faces of children on these pages.

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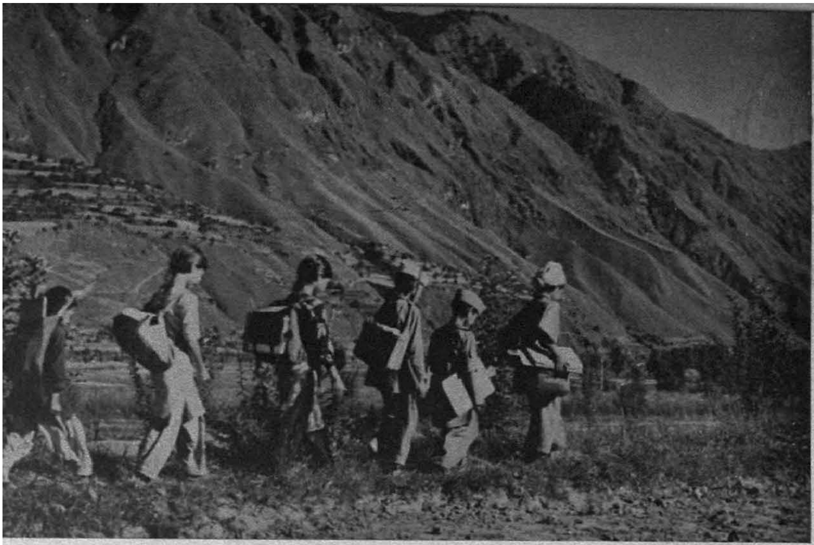

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In the last two decades, the number of schools in India has gone up manifold; so has the number of school-going children.

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Today, four-fifths of all children in the age-group 6-11 are at school.

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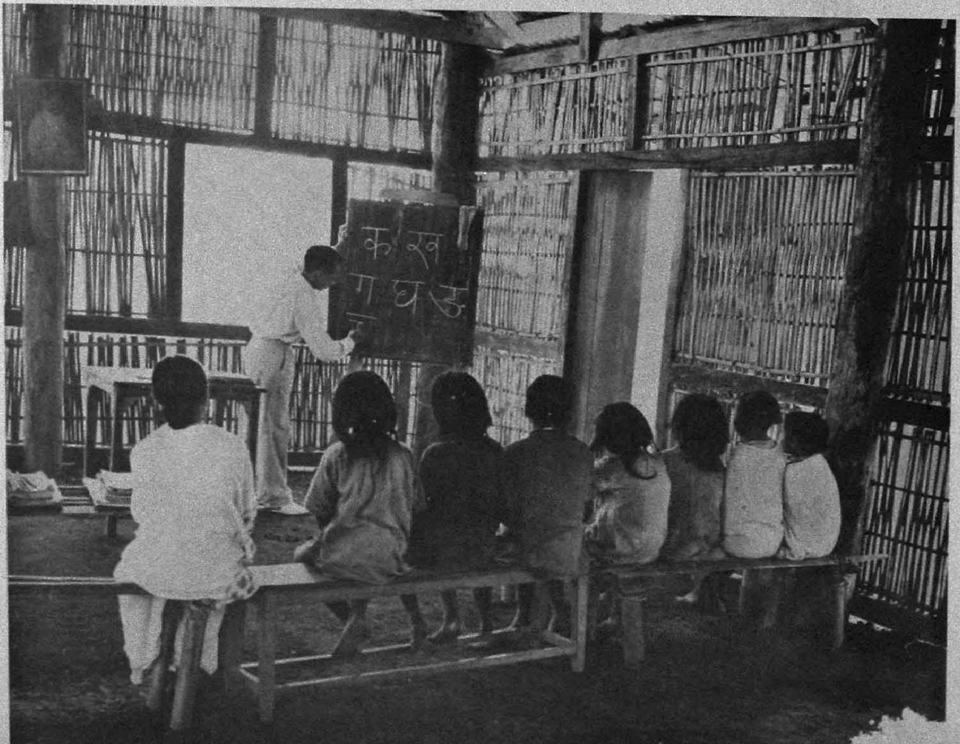

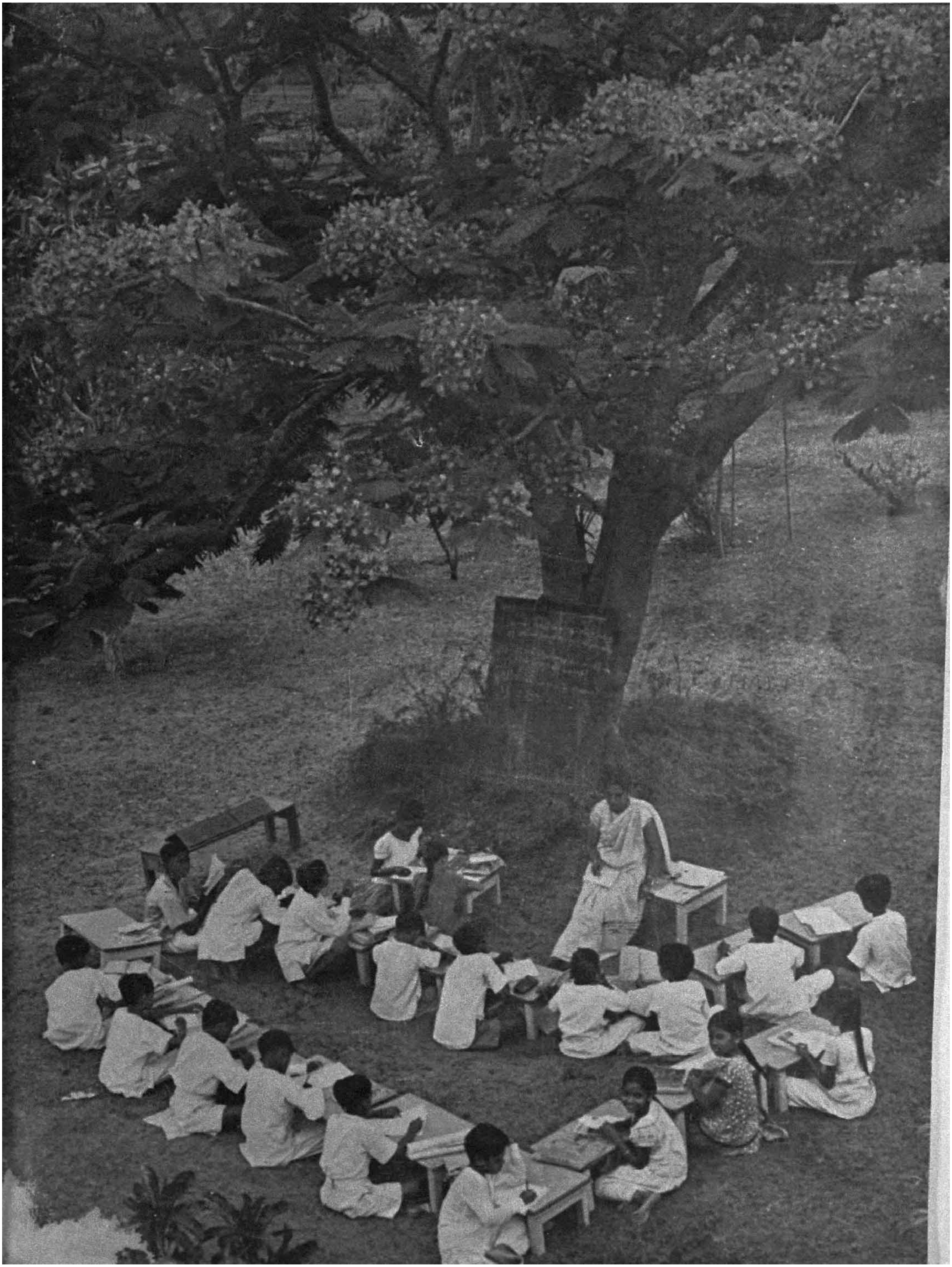

Schooling means more than learning to read and write and to do sums. It means learning the correct use of hands, brain and imagination and acquiring new skills. In more and more Indian schools, simple arts and crafts are also taught.

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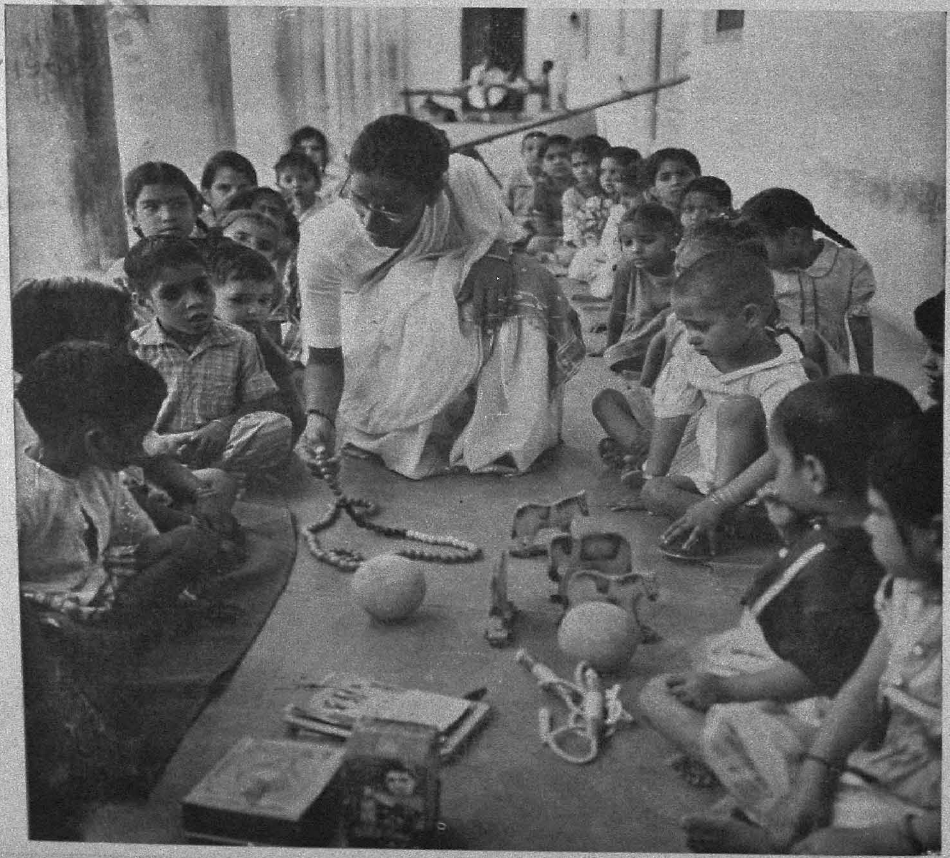

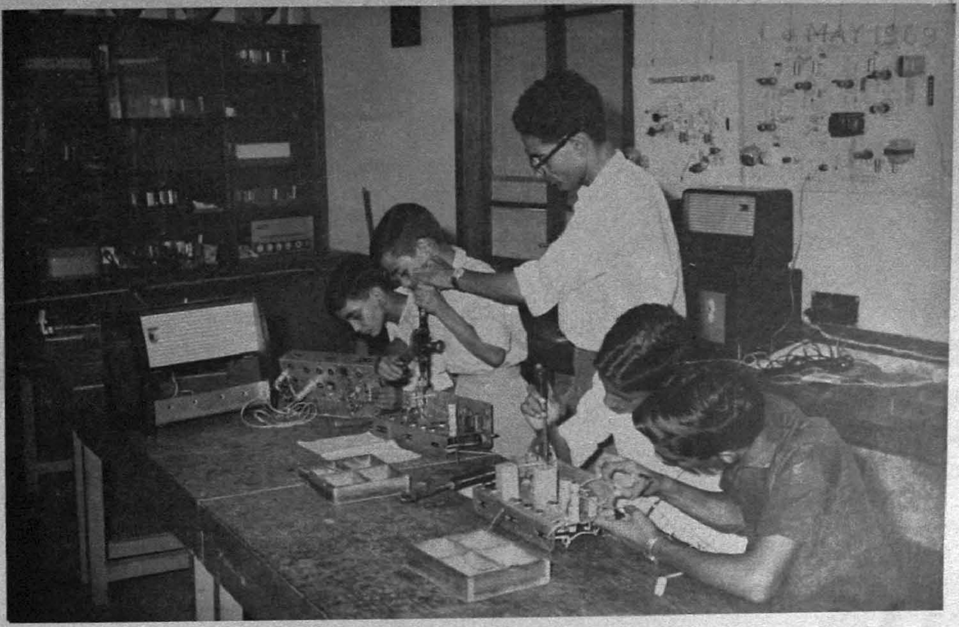

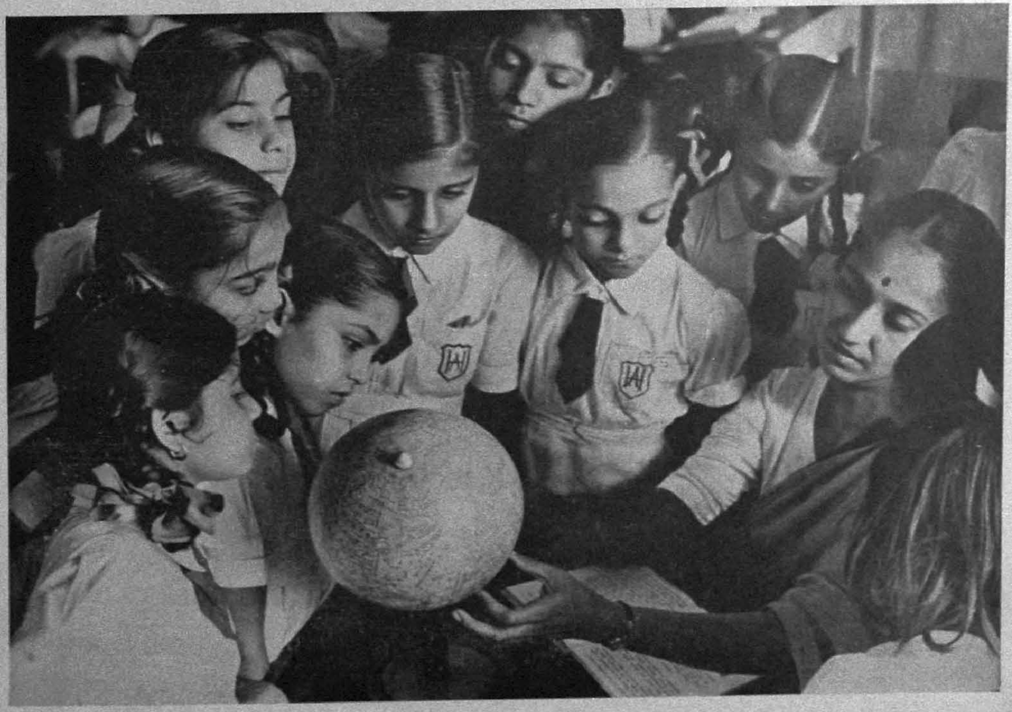

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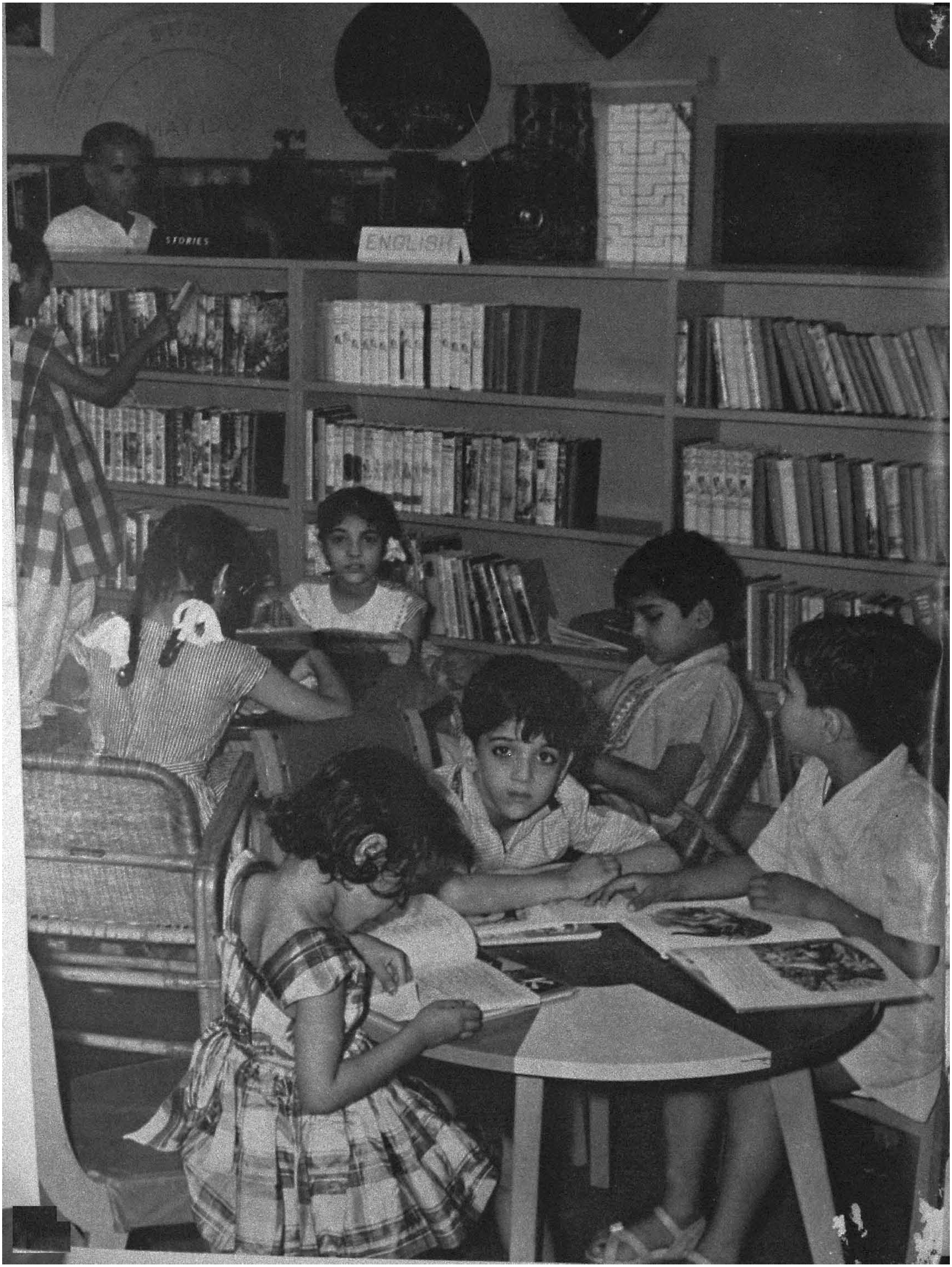
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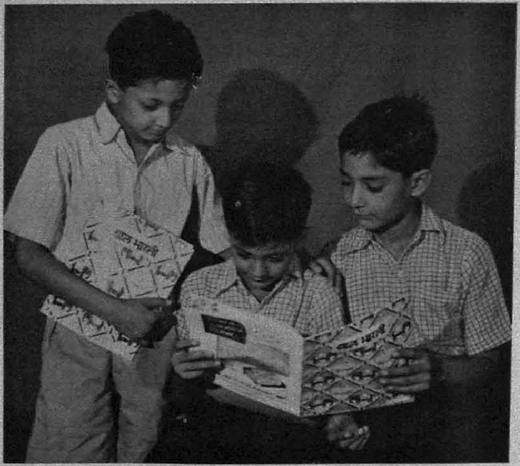

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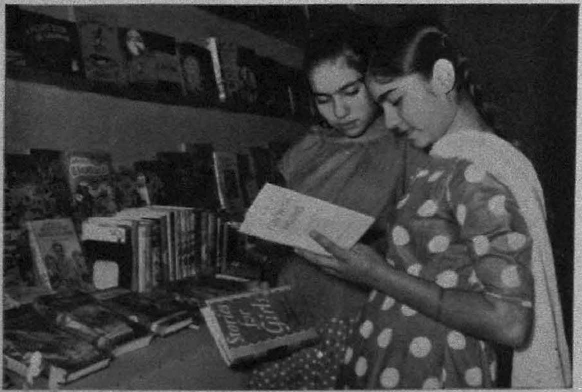
Also available to the child is the vast universe of knowledge congealed in books and magazines. Many schools have libraries. A growing body of children's literature caters to their special needs.



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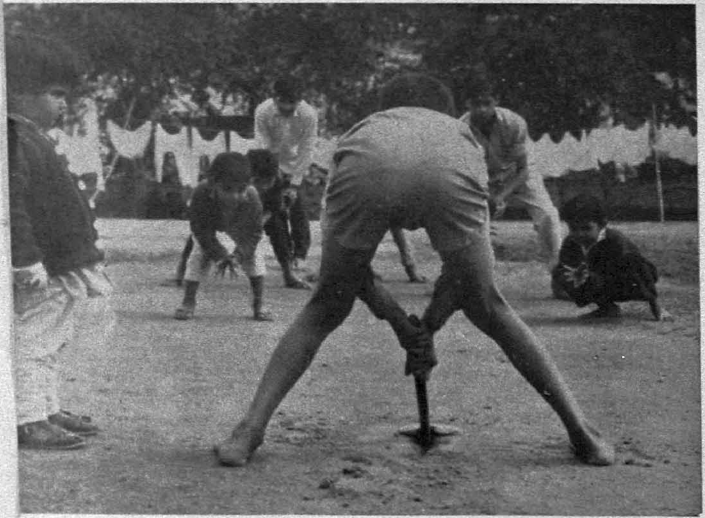
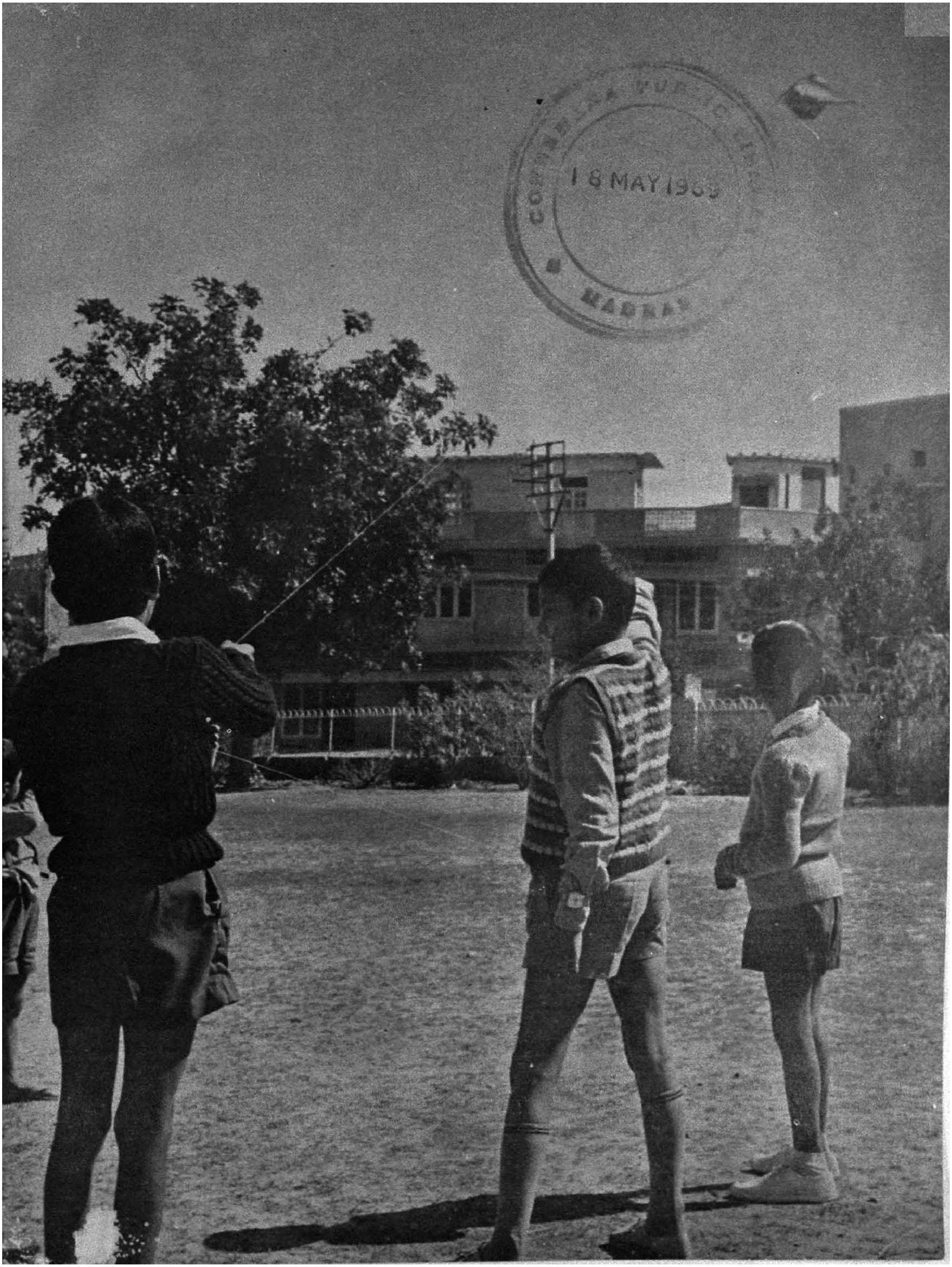
Go to any city or village in India and you will find that the children of the locality have converted every single vacant plot into a play ground. As for the games they play, cricket, foot ball, volley ball and hockey are as much a craze as simpler and traditional games like swinging, kabaddi, gullidanda and kite-flying.





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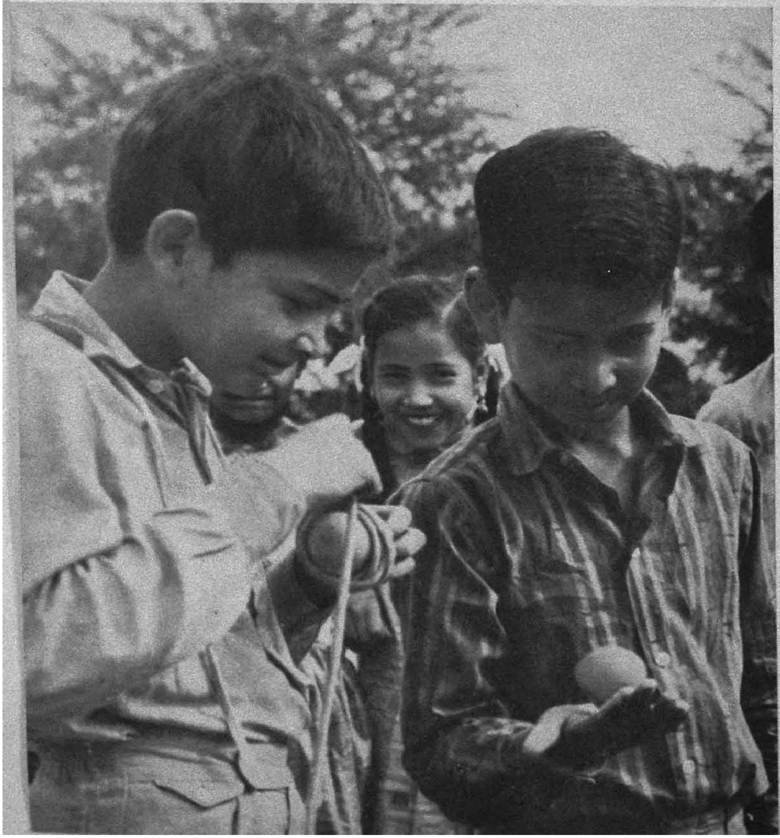
Little girls like to play with colourful wooden blocks; tops are a favourite with boys. The more energetic among the boys and girls take to the swing........



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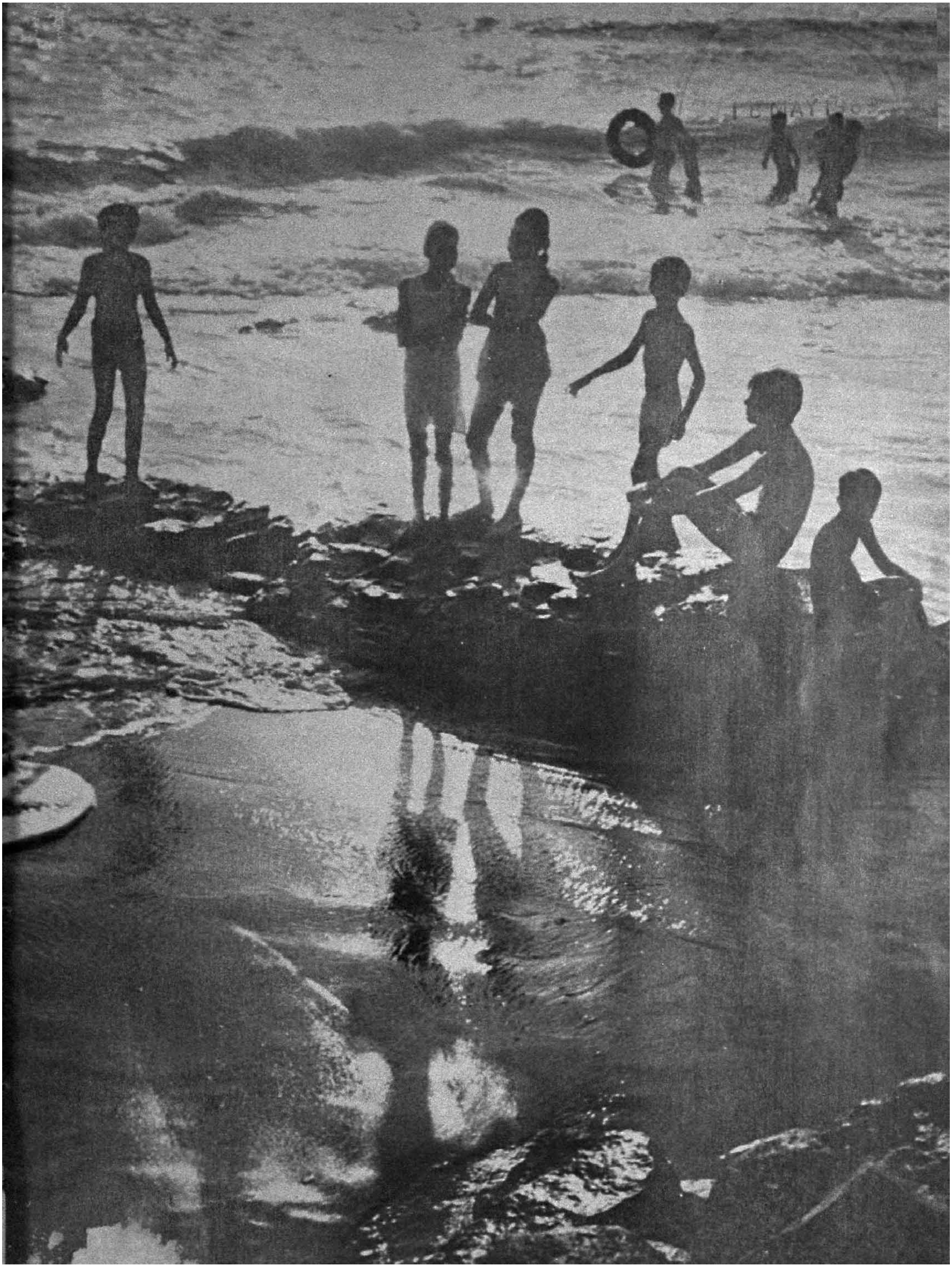
.........and to volley ball and swimming.



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Communities in villages and towns are putting up parks and play-grounds and zoological gardens for children.

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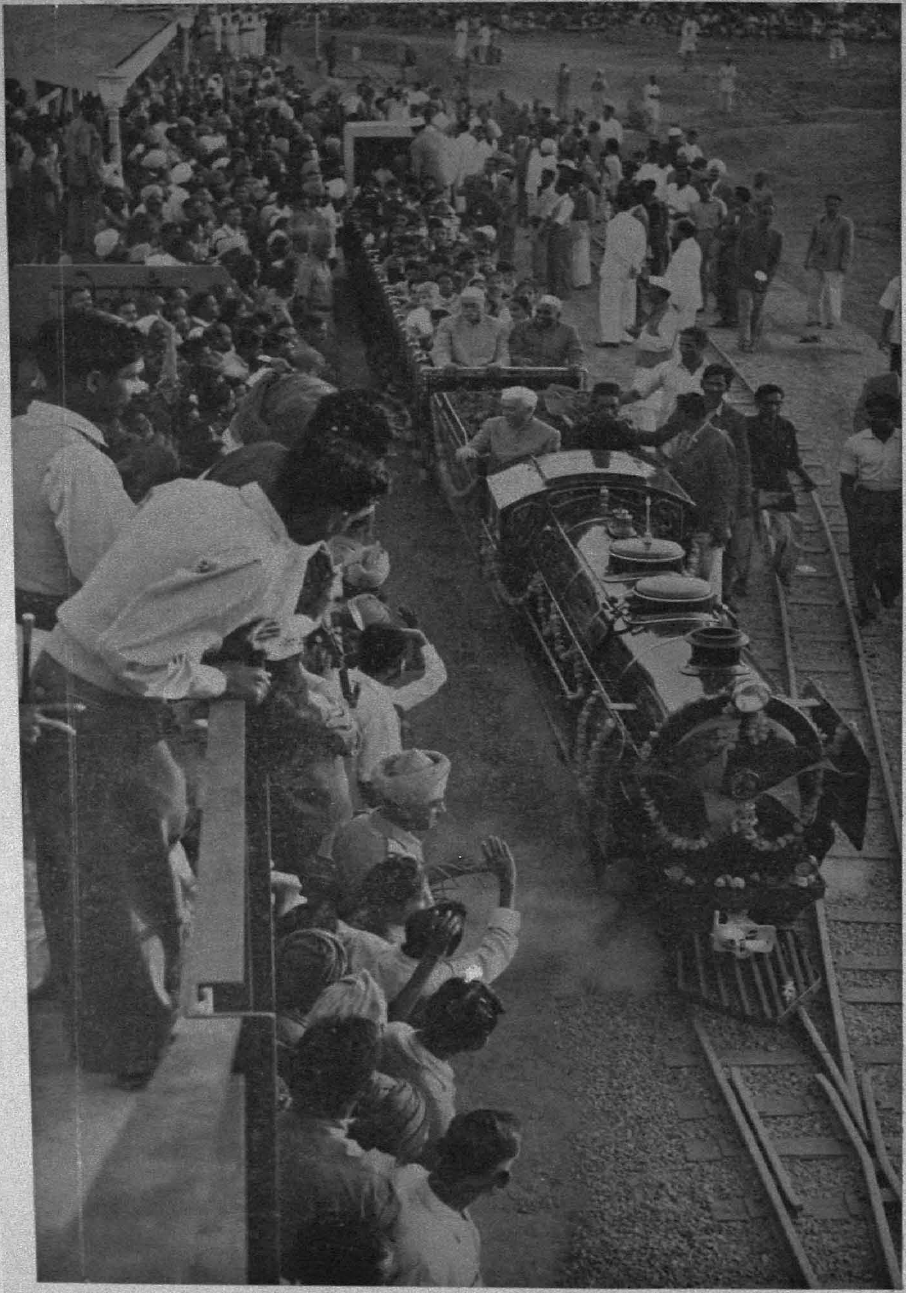

A children's park in Delhi has a miniature train run by children.... ...

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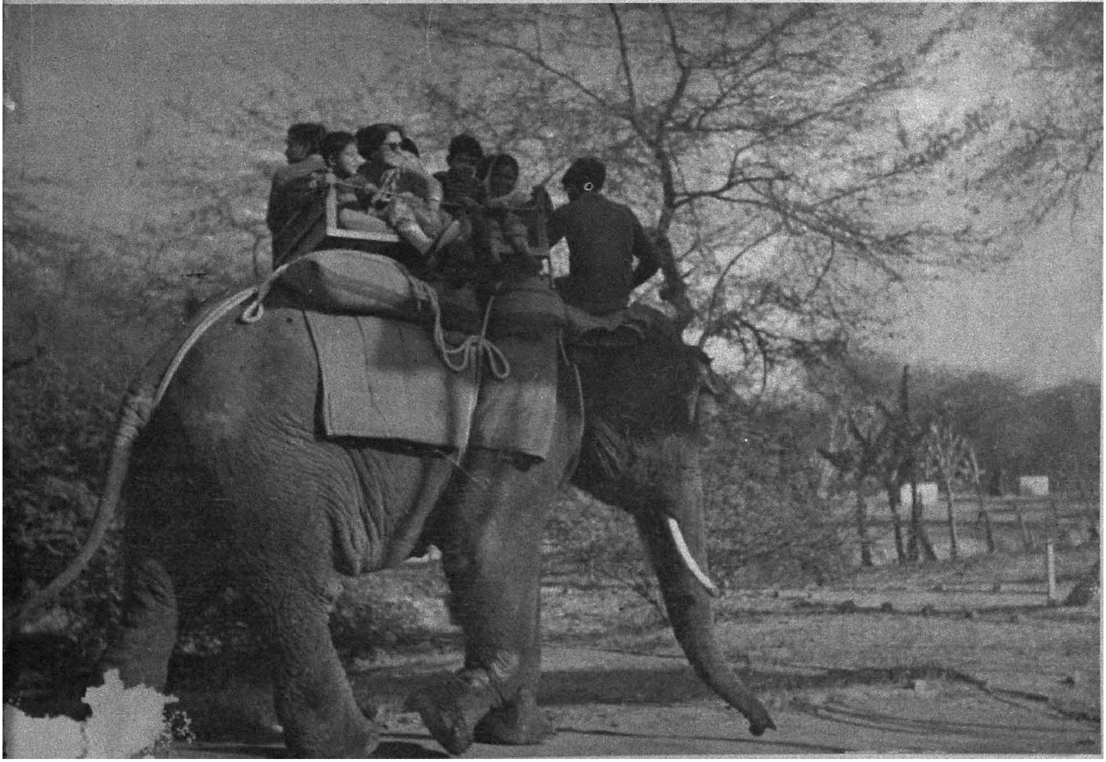
........and a major attraction at the zoo is the elephant ride.



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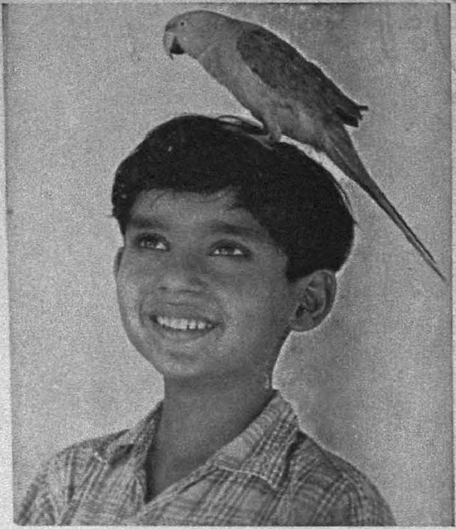

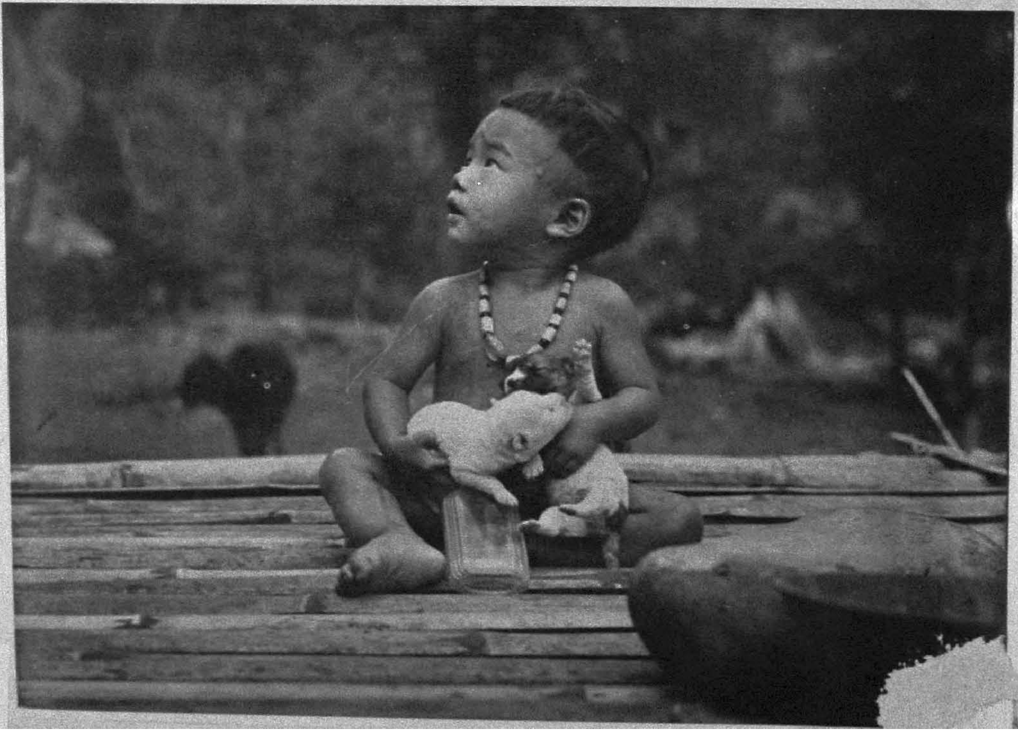

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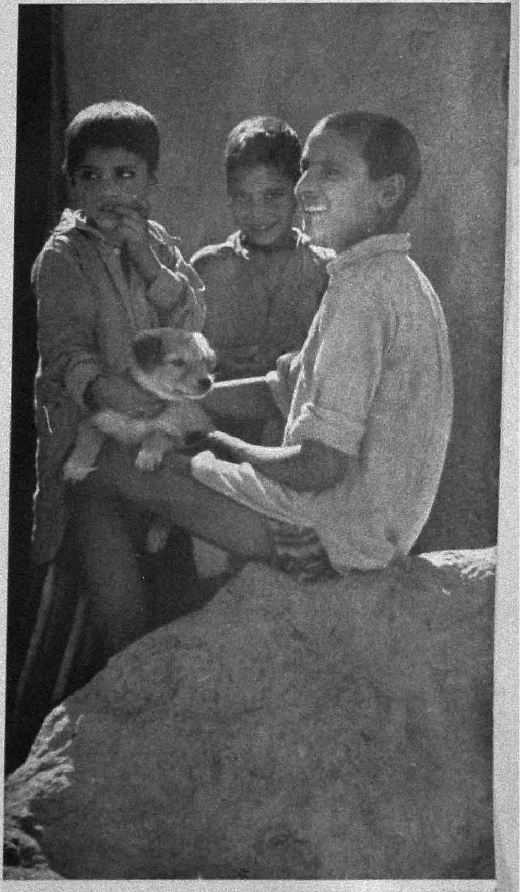
Being endlessly resourceful, children like to invent their own amusement, be it spending time with animal pets ....



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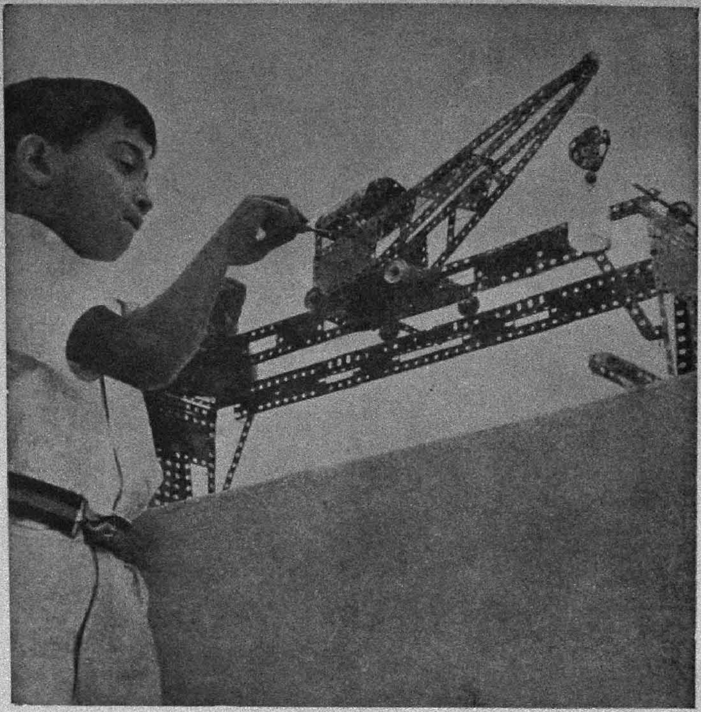

······or playing with toys······

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········or visiting exhibitions of their interest, or making their own dolls and toys.

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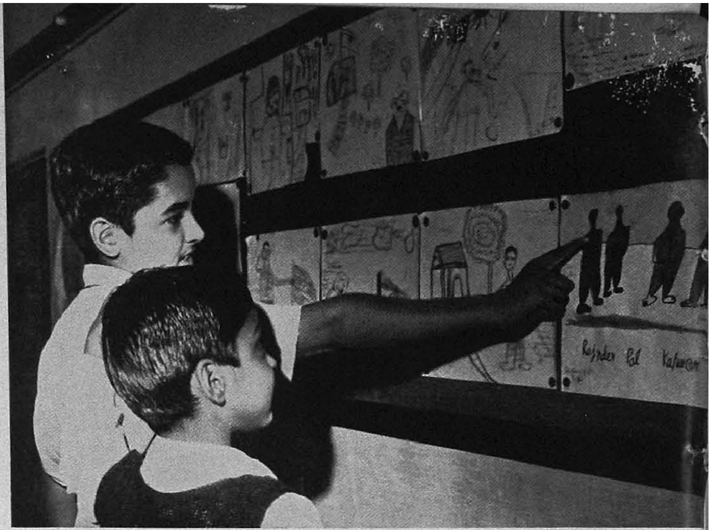
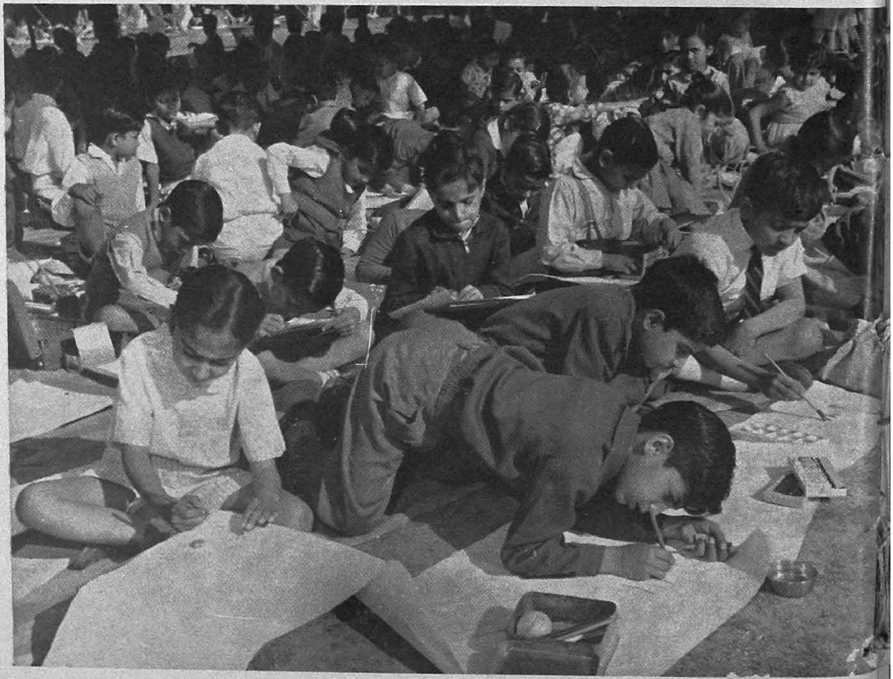


Children with a more creative bent of mind find delight in children's art competitions, and in producing plays and pageants.



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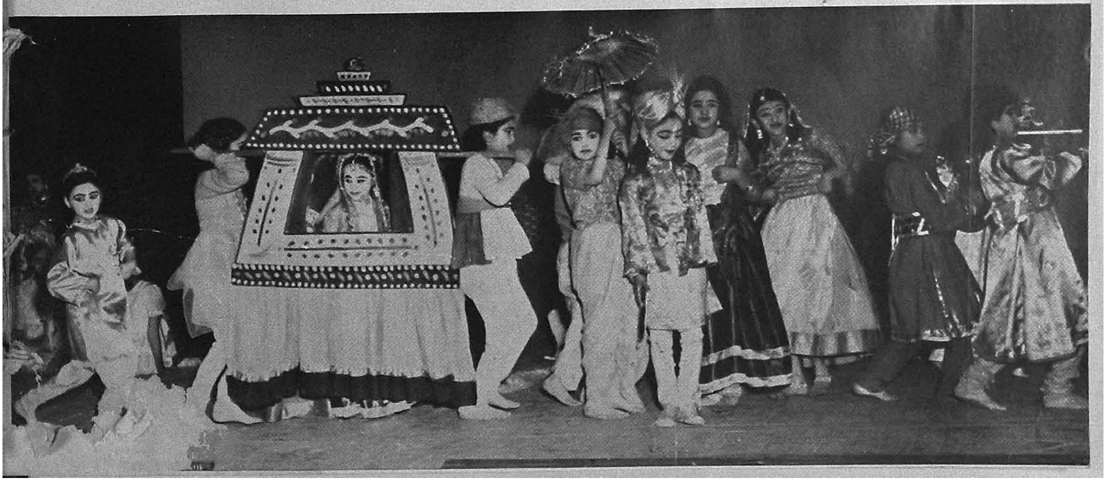
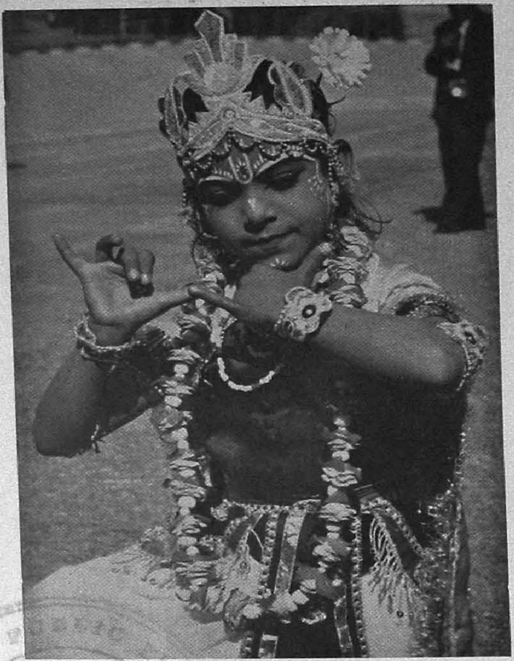


Children's films, children's theatre movements and children's hours on radio and television help in the discovery and development of young talent.



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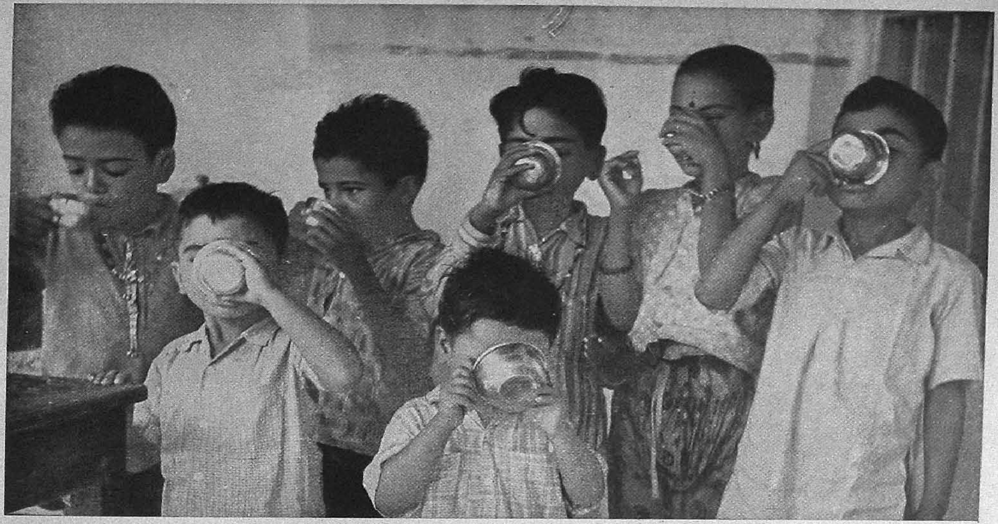
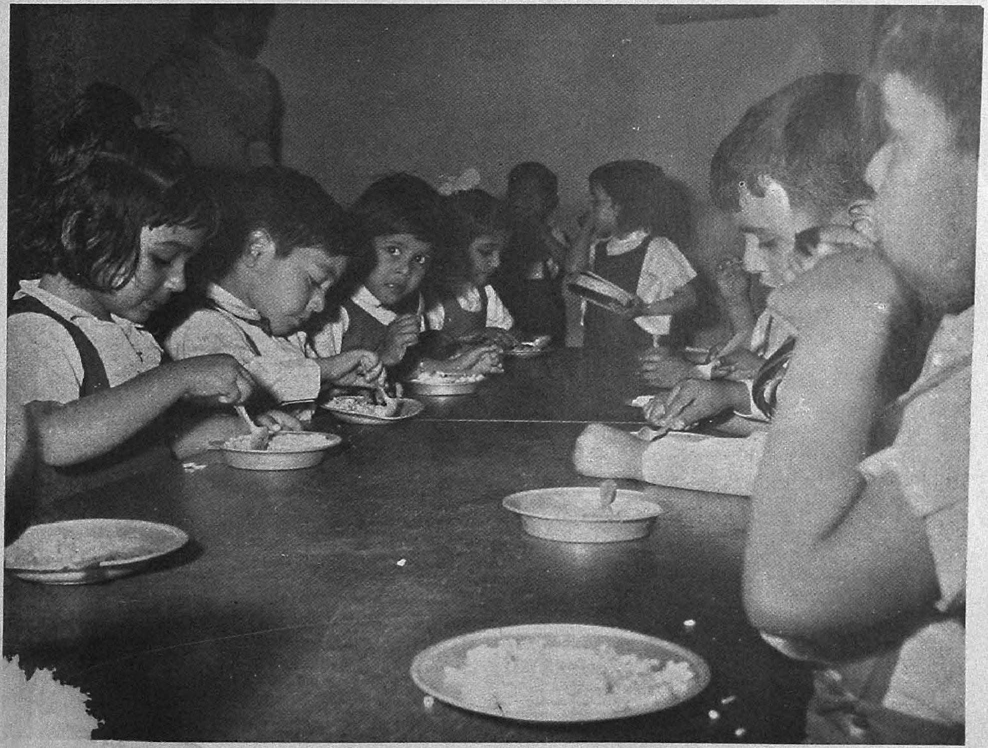
Healthy minds need healthy bodies. Welfare organizations help homes and schools in providing the growing child with a disease-free environment and nourishing diet.





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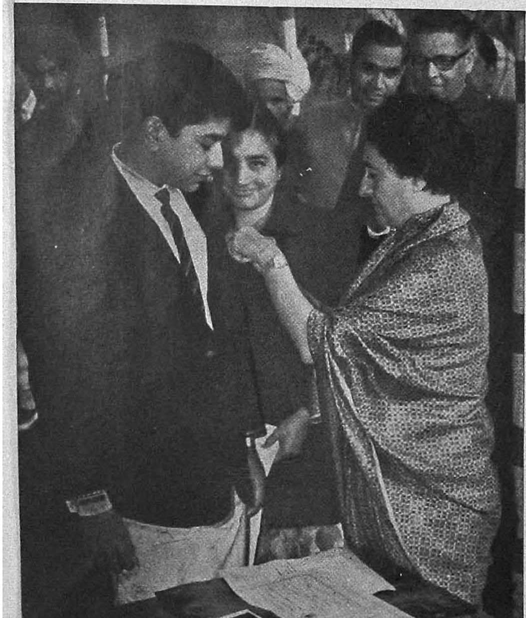
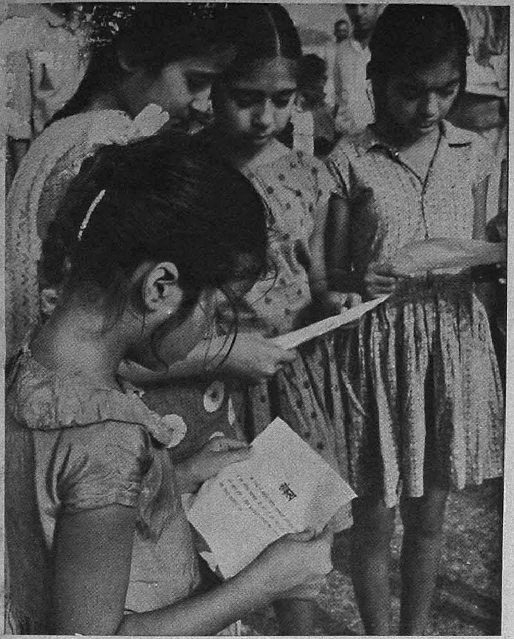
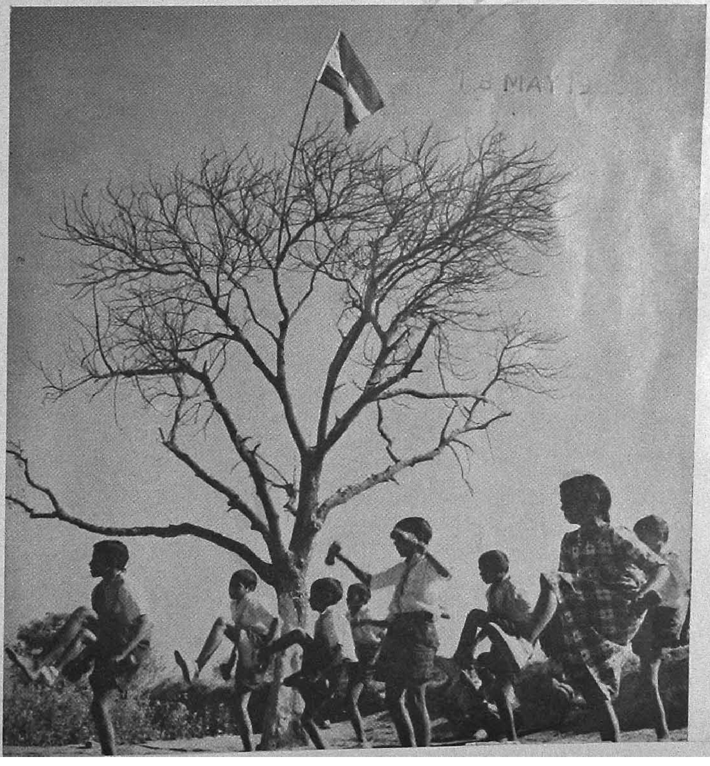
A network of child welfare centres carries medical care to the remotest village, and special clinics and wards exist for the benefit of disabled and retarded children.







Although we have so many of them, we Indians never get tired of children. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, even in the midst of historical happenings, found time for children. And when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi pins a medal on the coat of a child-hero, she expresses the love and concern for children felt by millions of our contrymen. The children of India respond by loving their country and rejoicing in the nation's tasks and triumphs.

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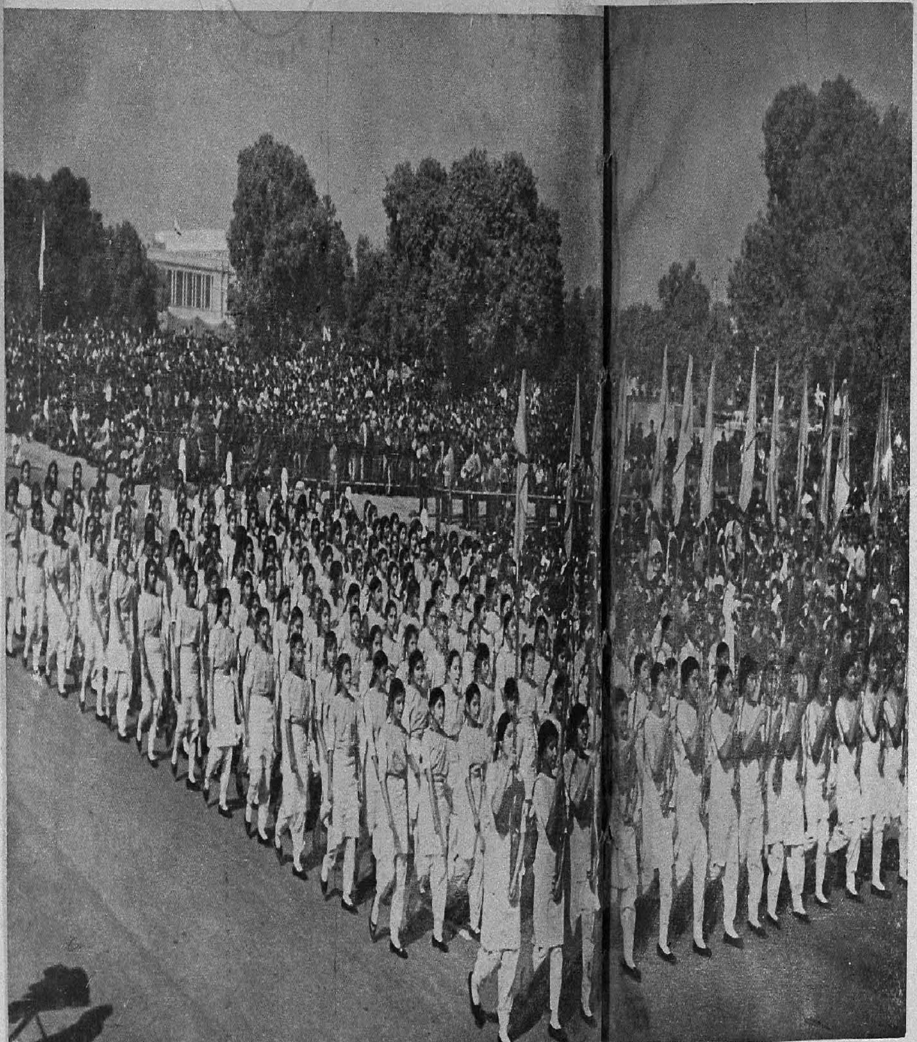

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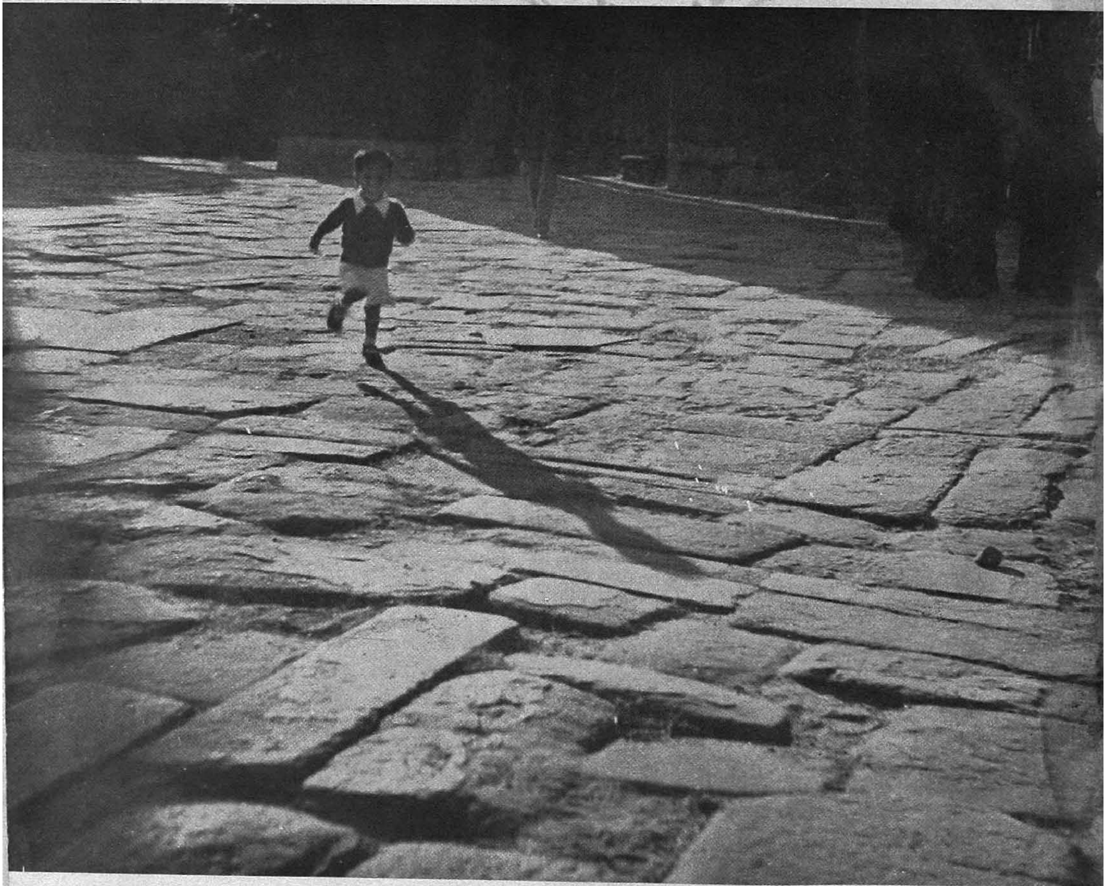

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